

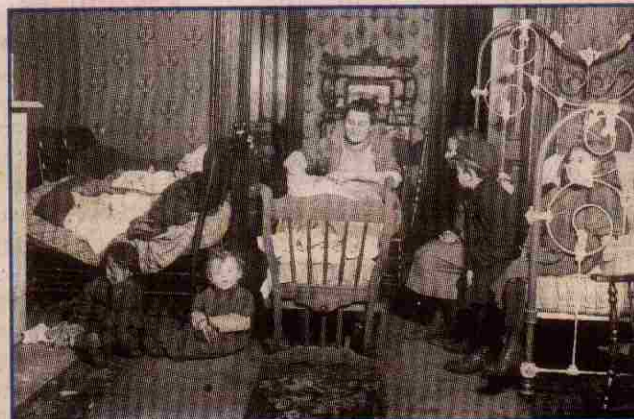
Immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, New York, 1895.



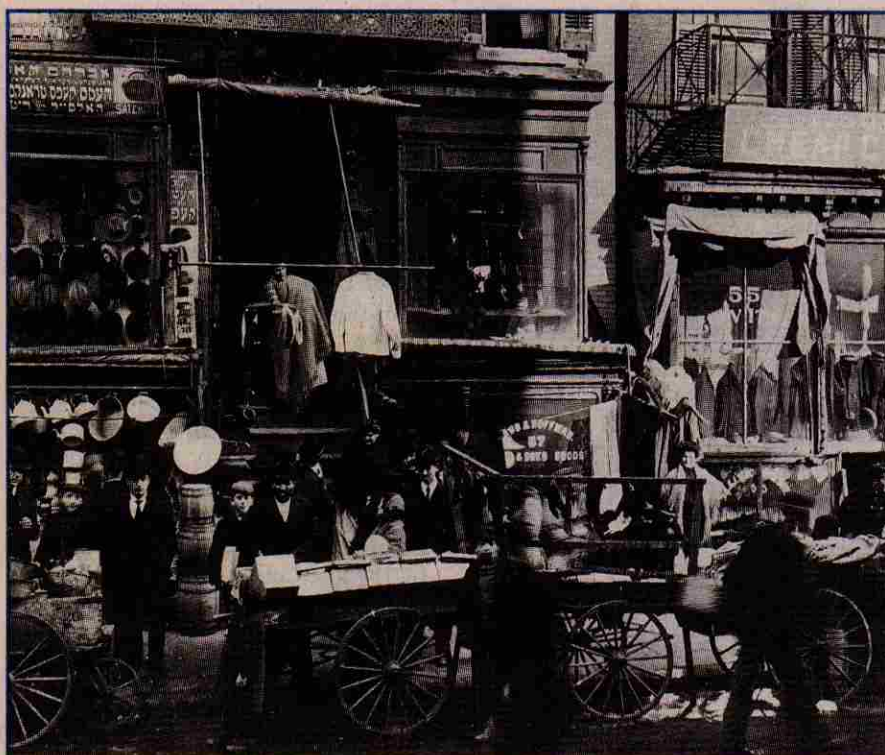
Coming to America

For more than 300 years, immigrants from every corner of the globe have settled in America, creating the most diverse nation on earth. Though immigrants have given much to the country, their passage here was never easy, nor their welcome always friendly.

By Tod Olson



An immigrant tenement flat, New York, 1907.



Hester Street, center of New York's Jewish immigrant community, 1900.

My imagination was aflame with America," recalled Louis Adamic, a Slovenian immigrant who came to the U.S. in 1913. "In America, everything was possible." Since 1600, more than 60 million people have brought their hopes and dreams to America. Representing more than 120 different ethnic groups, they have made the U.S. the most multicultural nation in the world.

Though immigrants have made major contributions to the U.S., their reception here has been mixed. Often they have been welcomed, at other times they've been shunned. But it is impossible to think of America without immigration. With the exception of some 2 million Native Americans, we have each come from immigrant roots. As Michael Pappas, who came here from Greece in 1913, said, "We are the ones who built America." Over the next four pages, we'll retrace the path that led immigrants like Pappas to these shores, and we'll look at the lives they found here.

1607-1820 The Arrival

"What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European or a descendant of a European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country."—Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *French immigrant and author* (1782)

"England is swarming," wrote a

British observer in the 1590s, "with valiant youths rusting and hurtful by lacke of employment." From 1607, when the first ragged band of English settlers arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, to 1820, when a new wave of immigration began, it was these "rusting youths" who colonized America.

Six out of 10 immigrants in Colonial times came from England. While the most vocal—Puritans, Pilgrims, and Quakers—came to escape religious persecution, most came for work. Many enjoyed wages triple those found in England. But nearly half came as indentured servants, selling their labor for seven years in exchange for free passage to America.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, Americans were a diverse lot. In addition to some 200 groups of Native Americans, the country in 1780 contained 3.2 million Europeans—60 percent English, 9 percent Irish, 8 percent Scottish, 8 percent German—and nearly 800,000 Africans, forcibly brought to the U.S. as slaves.

The Reception

"Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them?"—Benjamin Franklin, *American patriot* (1751)

Most immigrants in Colonial times were welcomed with open arms. Of

Chinese immigrant railroad workers, circa 1870.





Immigrants taking citizenship classes, circa 1940.

course, there were exceptions. Quakers and Jews could not testify in court in New York City. In 1698, South Carolina offered land to all newcomers—except Scotch-Irish, and Catholics. But in general, the Colonies not only welcomed immigrants, but sought them out. William Penn, for one, sent agents to Europe to proclaim the virtues of his Pennsylvania colony. After all, the infant colonies were desperate for that basic resource without which they couldn't survive: people.

1821-1890 The Arrival

"My dear Father . . . Any man or woman are fools that would not venture and come to this plentyful Country where no man or woman ever hungered or ever will and where you will not be seen naked."—Margaret McCarthy, Irish immigrant (1850)

In the mid-1800s, immigration began to soar. As many people arrived in the 1840s (1.7 million) as had come in the 230 preceding years. For the first time, the English were outnumbered at American ports by Germans and Irish, who made up 70 percent of America's foreign-born by 1860.

In the 1840s, disease wiped out potato crops in both Germany and Ireland, sending thousands of hungry peasants fleeing for their lives. "Children are born with their faces to the West," went one Irish saying. Most Irish, dirt poor when they arrived, settled in Boston

and New York City, working as unskilled laborers. The Germans, a little better off, headed for the farmland of the Midwest.

On the West Coast, the Chinese became the first non-Europeans to immigrate to the U.S. They were drawn by tales of gold; in fact, the Chinese name for California means "gold mountain." But many Chinese ended up in back-breaking labor on the railroads.

The Reception

"Wanted. A Cook or Chambermaid.

Must be American, Scotch, Swiss, or African—no Irish." — Help wanted ad, New York Evening Post (1830)

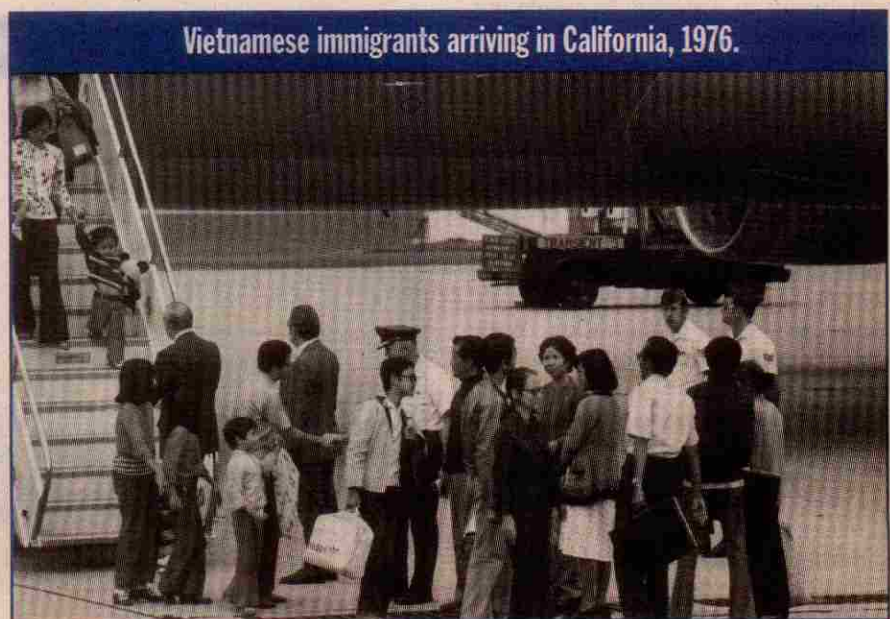
America in the mid-19th century still welcomed immigrants. Some Western states even gave immigrants the right to vote before they became citizens. But as the German, Irish, and Chinese populations grew, the old-guard English became resentful. The newcomers competed for jobs with native-born workers, and many of them practiced Catholicism in a mostly Protestant country. In the mid-1850s, the so-called nativists stole crosses and burned or attacked dozens of Catholic churches.

But Chinese immigrants suffered the most from the nativist movement. In 1876, a California legislative committee reported, "The Chinese are inferior to any race God ever made." And in 1882, all Chinese laborers were barred from entering the U.S.

1891-1924 The Arrival

"I came to America because I heard the streets were paved with gold. When I got here, I found out three things: First, the streets weren't paved with gold; second, they weren't paved at all; and third, I was expected to pave them."—An old Italian story

Nearly half of the 55 million people who have immigrated to the U.S. since 1607 arrived between 1880 and 1924. Steamship lines, by the 1880s, could make the trip across the Atlantic in



Vietnamese immigrants arriving in California, 1976.

Alex Webb/Magnum Photos

12 days, a far cry from the three months an immigrant had to spend on a sailing ship.

The vast wave of steamship passengers came from new places on the globe. In 1880, 87 percent of immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe; by 1907, 80 percent were from Eastern Europe. Polish and Russian Jews came to escape persecution at home; Italians, Greeks, and Slavs came looking for work. The new immigrants built thriving communities in the large industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Though they made up less than 15 percent of the population, these newcomers provided nearly half the labor for the factories of the Industrial Revolution.

The Reception

"Our capacity to maintain our cherished institutions stands diluted by a stream of alien blood. The U.S. is our land. We intend to maintain it so." — Congressman Albert Johnson (1924)

The huge rise in immigration came at a time when industrialization had already created vast social upheaval. Cities grew crowded with the poor, unemployment rose, and labor violence was common. The "new" immigrants—as they were called to distinguish them from the "old" Irish, Germans, and English—took much of the blame.

In 1886, the Statue of Liberty went up in New York Harbor, promising to keep America's "golden door" open to immigrants. Yet the U.S. Congress was already closing the door. In 1885, it banned those who arrived with "contracts to work." In 1891, "idiots, insane persons, paupers, felons," and those with a "loathsome or contagious disease" were barred. Anarchists, and illiterates soon followed. Still, when the Ellis Island immigration center opened in New York City in 1892, it received nearly half a million immigrants a year; fewer than 2 percent were turned away.

But as America recovered from World War I (1914-1918), the nativists

won the day. In 1924, a law was passed setting strict quotas on immigration, discriminating heavily against Eastern and Southern Europeans. Asians were banned completely. The golden door had swung closed.

1924-Present The Arrival

"There are no vacations, no pensions; they just work and work all their lives. We're willing to work, but can't find good jobs."—a Chinese garment worker, California, 1992

For 30 years after the quota laws were passed, Americans acted as if the age of immigration had ended. From 1925 to 1955, only 100,000 people a year moved to the U.S.

That all changed in the 1960s. In 1965, quotas based on nationality were lifted. With the U.S. economy booming, a new wave of immigration began. From 1930 through 1960, nearly 80 percent of immigrants came from Europe or Canada. Since 1960, almost 80 percent have come from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

These new immigrants have been settling in large cities and their suburbs, mainly in California, Texas, New York, and Florida. Like previous immigrants, many have been fleeing persecution or seeking a better life. And they've once again transformed the face of America.



Cuban refugees being greeted by their families, Miami, 1992.

The Reception

"During the next 15 years, the United States will create 30 million new jobs. Can we afford to set aside more than 20 percent of them for foreign workers?"—Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (1981)

"Immigrants come to this country seeking a better life, and their personal investments and hard work provide economic benefits to the country as a whole."—President's Council of Economic Advisers (1992)

In the past 50 years, the road has not been smooth for new Americans. Some 300,000 Japanese-Americans were interned, or confined in camps, during World War II. Latinos in Texas were often routinely forced to use segregated facilities. And in the unstable economic climate of the 1990s, fears are rising again that immigrants are taking jobs from American workers.

Still, as a percentage of our total population, immigration today is only one third as large as it was at the turn of the century. And many people argue that immigrant labor and resources actually add jobs to our economy. What is certain is that the immigrants of the 1990s, like Louis Adamic and others who came before them, will continue to add to the diversity that makes America stand out. ■